

FBI to open file on JFK assassination

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WASHINGTON — Nearly 14 years after President Kennedy's murder in Dallas the FBI is preparing to make public its massive "assassination file" containing all the material it gathered during its investigation of the case.

FBI officials said the first segment of the voluminous 80,000-page JFK file, covering the initial six months of the agency's probe, will be made available this month while the remainder is scheduled for public release in December. The disclosures are in response to more than 50 requests for material under the Freedom of Information Act.

Critics of the official version of events surrounding the Nov. 22, 1963 slaying in Dallas have sought access to the FBI's raw files almost from the day the Warren Commission concluded Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed the president. Others have been intrigued by what the FBI developed which was not included in the commission's 1964 report.

According to FBI officials, much of the data included in the assassination file already has been revealed through the testimony of witnesses before the commission and in documents used as exhibits in its 26-volume report. The trial of Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby, Oswald's killer, brought out still more, they said.

However, these officials explained the FBI's internal file also includes reports on certain aspects of the assassination which were discarded during the course of the investigation. These included reports on possible leads which were never verified, speculation about the meaning of certain facts and theories about the killing which later were disproven in the view of FBI agents.

An FBI spokesman said the bureau had been working on the file's preparation for 2½ years. Last summer 15 agents were assigned especially to the effort in addition to those who were already involved. He declined to name individuals who had filed requests for the material.

The disclosure, however, will not include documents the Warren Commission classified which are still sealed in the National Archives, the spokesman said. Nor will it include references to

data the FBI received from other federal sources such as the Central Intelligence Agency or the Secret Service.

Under provisions of the Freedom of Information statute, moreover, the FBI is permitted to delete the names of informants and any references to classified material. One FBI source said a large number of the pages will be blank because of deletions.

While FBI personnel involved in the project maintain there has for the most part been little opposition to disclosing particulars of the investigation, a number expressed concern that portions of the file may be misinterpreted if taken out of context.

This is especially true, one FBI official said, concerning "speculative" reports in which FBI agents may have
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Pre-assassination data on Oswald stirs interest

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theorized about Oswald's travels or other such aspects only to reject it after further investigation. "Selective reading on some part like that would be very misleading," the official said.

Robert P. Gemberling, a retired Dallas FBI agent who coordinated and analyzed the investigative effort throughout the Kennedy probe, said according to his knowledge of the assassination there will be no sensational revelations.

"There'll not be any earthshaking revelations at all," Gemberling said. "There may be some material that hasn't already come to light in one way or another but certainly nothing that would alter the fundamental conclusions of the Warren Commission."

He said the only instances he knew of that had not been revealed concerned the use of informants and perhaps double agents whose identities the FBI still wants to protect.

"The main problem, and I'm sure this will happen, is that people are constantly referring to 'new' information that the FBI or someone else withheld from the commission," Gemberling said. "People don't know where to look in the Warren Report to find things, and they don't realize we covered these items back in 1963 and 1964."

Private assassination researchers also appear to be awaiting the release of the file with no expectations of sensational revelations, although some feel the documents may provide valuable insight into how the FBI conducted its investigation of Oswald.

Paul Hoke, a Berkeley, Calif. researcher and co-author "The Assassinations — Dallas and Beyond," said his primary interest is in the FBI's knowledge of Oswald before the Kennedy assassination. Oswald was a defector to Russia who became the subject of an FBI security investigation after his return to the U.S. in 1962.

"The reason I'm so eager to see what they have on that aspect is that the FBI seemed so reluctant to tell the Warren Commission about it," Hoke said. "A group of FBI inspectors who studied the FBI's actions in this area seemed to have left open the question of whether he (Oswald) might have been an agent for a foreign intelligence group."

The pending release of FBI material will be the largest single disclosure of assassination material since the commission's official report, but a certain amount has been made public on a piecemeal basis over the years.

The National Archives since 1973 has declassified several hundred pages of documents relating to the commission's deliberations as well as evidence not included in their public report. Both the FBI and the CIA also have released portions of their case work in recent years.

"The most interesting stuff will be records of high-level procedural consideration of the case within the FBI," Hoke said. "I don't think anyone expects these agencies would be releasing bombshells if they had any, but it's the way they arrived at their conclusions, the internal memoranda and speculations that may be valuable."